



APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

BY A PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CLERGYMAN.

NOW and then a "Protestant Episcopal" minister makes an absurd claim in behalf of himself and of his Church, based upon what he calls the "Apostolic Succession."

These are very high sounding words. They mean this: "The first *Apostles*—the chosen twelve—were succeeded in the Church by a distinct order in the ministry known as *Bishops*, upon whom special powers and privileges were conferred. These bishops ordained other bishops, who in turn laid hands upon their successors, and the bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church are in that succession from the apostles.

It follows that those alone are true ministers who have been ordained by those apostolical bishops. All others are "pretenders and usurpers."

This is the claim. It is as false as it is ridiculous, and should deceive no one.

Here are the words of an earnest Protestant Episcopal minister, who, although a clergyman in that Church, repudiates, with hundreds of others, these foolish pretensions. He is one of the most distinguished and popular and learned men in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Read what he says about "Apostolical Succession:"

"This ultra view of the ministry is opposed to the *direct teaching* of the New Testament, as well as to its evident spirit. When God established a priesthood in the Jewish Church, of which a succession from a particular family, and in a particular line, was to be kept up from age to age, he not only distinctly pointed out which the family was from which this priesthood should be supplied, but he also established a particular form of ordination to be

used when they were consecrated or set apart to the functions of their high office; and at the same time, *by the most express and positive prohibitions, he fenced round the entrance to that priesthood*, so that none but the descendants of the one chosen family should have access to its privileges.

“But, when the Christian Church was established and the Christian ministry appointed, nothing of this kind was done. Jesus chose the seventy disciples and sent them forth to preach. He commissioned the twelve apostles. He gave them authority to teach and to baptize. He promised to be with them to the end of the world. But *he gave them no instructions whatever about the succession of the ministry*. He said nothing about the way in which ministers were to be ordained, or with whom the power of ordination was to rest. *The silence of Jesus on this subject is most instructive*. When he gave the apostles their commission, his instructions to them, as to the way of salvation, were so clear and distinct, so positively and negatively stated, that none

could mistake them. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." This was making the matter so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein. And when we consider the clearness and decision of our Lord's teaching on this point, and reflect that on the subject of the ministry—who were to be ordained, and by whom their ordination should be administered—*Jesus never said one word*, we see a very strong reason for rejecting the ultra views of the ministry held by our High-Church brethren.

"When we pass from the Gospels to the Acts and the Epistles the state of the case is not materially altered. That episcopal ordination was practiced by the apostles, and that a threefold ministry did exist in their day we think is clear. But still, even they, when they come to speak of the ministry and of ordination, seem to have followed very closely the example of their Master in this respect. They say *nothing positive* and *nothing negative* on the subject. All that can be drawn from their

writings is *inferential*. And these inferences, even, are not so clear that Christian men, equally intelligent, equally honest, and equally desirous of arriving at the truth, are able to agree about them.

“‘In no part of the Scripture,’ I quote from ‘Litton on the Church,’ ‘is the rule laid down that to a legitimate ordination the presence of the apostles or their delegates was necessary; no intimation was given that a mystical virtue resided in the inspired founders of the Church, which they only were capable of transmitting, and without the transmitted possession of which no one was entitled to preach the word, or administer the sacraments. When the apostles were present, they, for obvious reasons, commonly ordained; where there were no apostles, others might perform this office, provided only they did so in an apostolical spirit.’

“And Dr. Cosin, one of the most strenuous advocates of episcopacy, agrees entirely with the position here taken as to the testimony of Scripture on this point. ‘I conceive,’ says he, ‘that the power of ordination was restrained

to bishops rather by apostolic practice and the perpetual custom and canons of the Church, than by any absolute precept that either Christ or his apostles gave about it. Nor can I yet meet with any convincing argument to set it upon a higher and more divine institution.'

"Thus it appears that this liberal view of the ministry is in harmony with the spirit and teaching of the New Testament, while the ultra view is opposed to both; and, for this reason, I hold to the former and reject the latter.

"In the second place, I hold to the liberal view of the ministry in preference to the ultra, because the one agrees with the plain facts of God's providence, while the other contradicts those facts.

"It is a fact of God's providence that there are assemblies of faithful men, outside of our denomination, calling themselves Christian Churches; it is a fact that among these Churches are hundreds and thousands of men set apart to the work of the ministry; it is a fact that these men, though without episcopal ordination, are called and sent forth among their several

Churches as ministers of Christ; it is a fact that they preach the truth of Christ in its simplicity and fullness; it is a fact that God bestows on these men the spirit of Christ, and enriches them with precious ministerial gifts; it is a fact that God owns and blesses their ministry by making it effectual in the conversion of souls, and in building them up in the knowledge of his truth and the experience of his grace, and that he thus puts the broad seal of his acceptance upon them as his ministers. These are facts of God's providence. They are open, palpable facts, wrought out before the world and before the sun. Now, if I hold the ultra views of the ministry, against which I am arguing, what shall I do with these facts? If I am true to my principles, there is nothing left for me to do but to contradict them. I must maintain, that without episcopal ordination there can be no ministry. I must maintain, of these large bodies of so-called Christians around me, that they have no valid ministry, and no duly administered sacraments; and that thus, being without a Christian ministry

and Christian sacraments, the bodies which they compose cannot be Christian Churches; and that all the members of those bodies are simply mistaken in supposing themselves to be in real covenant relation to Christ. But this is a position marked by absolute absurdity. The man who can maintain it might as well stand forth at noon-day and declare that there is no sun in the firmament, or walk out under night's sparkling canopy and deny that there are any stars in the sky. And when this position is affirmed by members of one of the smallest Protestant bodies in the land, there is a degree of *arrogant assumption* about it that admits of no defense. Nay, more, it seems to be a position that is justly chargeable in the sight of God with grievous sin. It approaches very near to the position which the Pharisees occupied in our Lord's day, when he charged upon them the sin against the Holy Ghost.
